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ABSTRACT

Past research has shown significant treatment versus control differences using paradox, although the literature often does not detail how the paradoxical directive is given to the client. College students (N=105) were tested with the Procrastination Log and the 40 with the highest scores were selected in order to study the effectiveness of paradox in changing students' procrastination habits. To determine if a one-interview or two-interview condition would be most effective, students were divided into four treatment conditions: (1) one interview; (2) one interview, rescheduled; (3) two interviews; and (4) no interview control. Counseling interviews included paradoxical interpretations and homework. Results from the dependent measures were largely negative. Students in all conditions appeared to improve on procrastination behavior over time. Overall, the findings did not yield information relevant to the one session versus two session issue. However, the findings appear relevant to the area of paradox research because of their lack of significance. (JAC)

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THE IMPACT OF CONTINUING CONTACT ON THERAPEUTIC CHANGE

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982.

This report is of a study using two paradoxical techniques with volunteer client procrastinators. The purpose of this study was to test two hypotheses: (1) that students in paradoxical interview conditions would change more than would students in a no-interview control condition, and (2) that students in a two-interview condition would experience more lasting change than would students in a one-interview condition -- whether or not the one-interview students anticipated a second interview.

Subjects were 105 undergraduate psychology students who volunteered to participate in a study on counseling methods to help procrastination. The students were tested with the Procrastination Log (a 13-item questionraire) and the 40 with the highest scores were selected for the study.

The interviewers were three female second-year counseling psychology graduate students. Each interviewer was randomly assigned an equal number of students per treatment condition. In addition, students were ranked by their pretest Procrastination Log scores and grouped by fours such that each group of four contained a subject assigned to each condition.

The interviewers followed scripts and used cue sheets during the 40-minute interviews. The first interview script contained five sections: purpose, permission to take notes, description of the problem, paradoxical interpretations, paradoxical homework assignment and closing. The second interview script included six sections: opening, review of the

homework, review of the past, new paradoxical interpretations, closing and summary, and referral. In addition to the scripts, the interviewers used basic attending skills such as reflection of feeling, restatement, questioning and summarizing throughout the interviews. Here are two examples of paradoxical interpretations used: "You are sensitively aware of your own needs and strengths -- you seem to pace your work according to when you work best -- under pressure," and "you are really sensitive to the social needs of others -- you sacrifice your studying to socialize with them." The paradoxical homework assignment was for the students to continue procrastination but to note, at the time it was happening, what they were doing, how they were feeling and why they were doing it.

The four treatment conditions were as follows: <u>first condition: one interview</u>. These students received one counseling session. At the end of the session, the student and the counselor were informed that the student would not be seen for a second session. The student returned in four weeks for follow-up testing. <u>Second condition: one interview, rescheduled</u>. These students also received one counseling session. At the end of the session, the student and counselor were led to believe that the student would be seen for a second session the next week. During the week of the second session, the student was contacted and told that the counselor would be unable to keep the appointment. The student was scheduled for a follow-up testing session four weeks after the counseling session. The purpose of this treatment condition was to test whether the

paradoxical techniques worked more because the student had repeated contact with the counselor who made such unusual statements or because the student, during the week between sessions, thought about the unusual statements. Third condition: two interview. These students received two counseling sessions separated by one week. They returned for follow-up testing four weeks after the second session. Fourth condition: no interview control. These students had taken the Procrastination Log pretest and they came in for subsequent testing at the same times as the one-interview students.

The assignment of subjects to conditions not only controlled for pre-treatment level of procrastination, but also controlled for level of commitment, since all 40 chosen subjects agreed to participate in research that included up to two counseling sessions. In addition, during the first interview the counselors were blind to treatment condition.

The results from the dependent measures were largely negative. Unlike earlier studies using paradox with procrastinators, there was no significant difference between the treatment and control conditions on the Procrastination Log. In other words, students in all conditions appeared to improve on procrastination behavior over time.

Since one of the paradoxical techniques used was a positive interpretation of the student's procrastination behavior, students were given an eight-item questionnaire assessing the degree to which they attributed positive characteristics to

themselves. There were no significant differences between conditions or over time on this measure.

In order to determine student attitudes toward the counselor, a modified version of the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory was given. On the Empathic Understanding, the Unconditional Regard and the Resistance subscales there were no significant differences between treatment conditions. Interestingly, the Resistance subscale scores increased significantly over time due to an increase in the scores of the group that anticipated a second session and did not receive one.

The first hypothesis stated that one session paradoxical interview contacts would effect more change on procrastination outcome measures than would a no-interview testing condition. Since there was no significant main effect for condition or condition by time interaction effect for the Procrastination Log, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

The second hypothesis stated that two session paradoxical interviews would lead to more lasting change, as measured by the one-month follow-up, than would the one session interview conditions, whether or not subjects in the one-interview condition anticipated a second interview. The Procrastination Log scores yielded no significant main effect for condition or condition by time interaction effect. Again, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

The Resistance subscale time effect indicates that students in the treatment conditions -- and not control condition students, since the latter did not complete the Relationship Inventory -- experienced more resistance at the follow-up than after the first paradoxical interview session. Since the treatment condition students improved on procrastination outcome no more than did the control subjects, it is possible that the treatment condition subjects experienced little improvement of symptoms and felt resistant toward the counselors' unusual (paradoxical) methods.

Overall, the findings did not yield information relevant to the one session versus two session issue. Therefore this study did not provide information relevant to the general field of analogue research. The findings appear relevant to the area of paradox research, though, because of their lack of significance. Other researchers (Hawks, Note 1; Lopez & Wamback, 1982; Wright & Strong, 1982) reported significant treatment versus control differences using paradox. It is possible that the method of delivering paradoxical directives was ineffective in the present study. Although the literature on paradox often does not detail how the paradoxical directive is given to the client, the work by Selvini-Palazzoli et al. (1978) suggests that their delivery of a paradoxical directive was done with minimal explanation -- unlike the reasoned arguments given in this study.

List of References

Reference notes

1. Hawks, B. Effects of attributions on continued decrease of of procrastination. Master's thesis, Virginia Commonwealth University.

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